



**ENTERTAINMENT  
SOFTWARE  
RATING BOARD**  
WWW.ESRB.ORG



## ESRB Video Game Ratings Help You Choose Appropriate Games For Your Loved Ones



**A**t one time, video games were primarily thought of as being for kids. Over the years, however, video games have become more appealing to a much broader audience and expanded beyond just children's video games. The average age of a video game player today is actually 33, so just like movies and TV shows, some video games are meant for children and some aren't. That's why there's a video game ratings system to help you decide which ones are suitable for your family.

The ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) video game ratings appear on the packaging for virtually every game sold in the U.S. and Canada, and provide a clear and effective way to determine whether a game is appropriate. One of six **rating symbols** on the front of the box suggests age appropriateness for the game:

- eC** (Early Childhood, ages 3+)
- E** (Everyone, ages 6+)
- E10+** (Everyone 10 and up)
- T** (Teen, ages 13+)
- M** (Mature, ages 17+)
- AO** (Adults Only, ages 18+)

On the back of the package, next to the rating symbol, are **content descriptors** that are assigned relative to the rating category and indicate material in a game that may have triggered the rating that was assigned, or might just be of interest or concern. Together, the two parts of the ESRB rating system allow consumers to make informed choices.

ESRB ratings have been assigned to computer and video games since 1994, and are today considered by many parents to be the most useful among the various media ratings (i.e. TV, movies, music and video games). In fact, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) endorses the ESRB ratings as "an extremely useful and informative

tool,” and three in four parents with children who play video games regularly check the ESRB rating when purchasing games.

You can find out how a game has been rated before heading to the store by checking the ESRB website at [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org). Once there, you can search not only by game title and game system (i.e. console/platform), but also by rating category and content descriptor.

## **BEYOND THE RATINGS**

As with any choice, the more information you have, the better decision you'll be prepared to make. Additional information about the games kids want can be found on numerous websites and in game enthusiast magazines, many of which provide extensive reviews and details about game content. Some may even offer screenshots (pictures from the gameplay), which can offer a good sense of a game's content. The **Parent Resources** section of the ESRB website offers links to many of these websites, including a few that recommend family-friendly and children's video games. Doing research ahead of time is a good way to learn and make sensible selections.

Another good source of information can be employees at your local video game store. In addition to stores that specialize in selling video games, many major retailers sell games as well, and employ store associates who are specially trained to work in the section of the store where video games can be found. These employees are often video game players themselves and are likely to be familiar with the ones your loved ones might be asking for, so ask them for their recommendations and don't be afraid to ask questions. It's critical to know before you go to the store what game system the child plays on, such as Nintendo Wii or GameCube, Microsoft Xbox 360, Sony PlayStation 3, or a handheld like the PSP or Nintendo DS. That way you'll be prepared to buy the game that works on the child's game system, since many of them are not compatible.

Finally, one of the most important things you can do is to actually play games with your family members, and talk with them about the ones they enjoy. It may sound overwhelming, but this is a wonderful way to learn about the video games the kids are playing and spend time together having fun as well.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

For more information about choosing appropriate video games, and to sign up for the ESRB's **e-newsletter**, visit [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org).

**Questions?** Contact the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs' Office of Consumer Protection at 202-442-4400 or visit [www.dcre.dc.gov](http://www.dcre.dc.gov).